

**Introducing Post-Existential Practice**  
*An Approach to Wellbeing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

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**Abstract**

This paper, in introducing this Special Issue, proposes a place for exploring notions of wellbeing at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that are in contrast to the increasing cultural dominance of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). An attempt is made to offer a space where we might still be able to think about how alienated we are through valuing existential notions such as experience and meaning whilst questioning other aspects such as existentialism's inferred narcissism and the place it has come to take up with regards to such aspects as psychoanalysis and the political. The post-existential would also include the post-phenomenological, where, for example, Merleau-Ponty's notion of being open to what emerges in the between (as well as his notion of embodiment) would be given primacy over Husserlian notions of intentionality. As a result, questions such as those of mystery, an unknown and an unconscious and the non-intentional can be re-examined. A third element to be explored will be the extent to which we might consider more recent ideas—for example, Saussure, Levinas, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan and Wittgenstein—without becoming too caught up in them. It is hoped by having a possible space to explore, what some would now call, our 'wellbeing', theoretically through post-existentialism and methodologically through post-phenomenology, that this can provide a loose base, with concerns of any further generalisation, for a greater possibility of accepting, rather than escaping, who we are.

**Keywords:** *wellbeing, post-existential, post-phenomenological, existential, psycho-analysis, post-modern*

## **The Between as Unknown**

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### **Abstract**

A way of approaching post existential practice is illustrated through the idea that relationships occur in the between, which is largely unknown, except as suggested by Laing, through our experience. A difficulty occurs, however, when we are not able to be grounded in our experience which could be seen as a form of ontological insecurity brought about by intolerance of unknowing. It is argued here that this intolerance can lead us to replace the possibility of our own experience with some one else's story of their experience which is presented to us as theory, which could then be seen as an obstruction of the between. Post existentialism does not, however, discard theory but requires the ability to: firstly engage with our experience through the between, deferring the need to reach for theories; secondly question whether the ideas that do occur to us are simply a return to theory as a familiar place needed in the face of our own anxiety or dread and; thirdly remain open to where the return to such formulations becomes a way of reconstituting more of the same rather than permitting difference. Such aspects are firstly explored in terms of the relational as between (Laing) and as transitional space (Winnicott). Secondly this is followed by a return to some existential phenomenological ideas which illustrate something of the dread of possibility (Kierkegaard) as well as offering an approach which may help us to sustain attention to experience in relationship (Heidegger, Merleau Ponty). Thirdly the postmodern is then seen to raise questions about the way knowing and language can create a binding that closes down (Derrida) whereas the idea of the semiotic (Kristeva) illustrates how something threatens rupture and moves us elsewhere than intentionality. In turn too much rupture can lead to chaos thus some form of structure is seen as necessary. Here the post existential with its post phenomenology provides an intersection between existential phenomenology, psychoanalytic and postmodern thought where a between is permitted through a willingness to continually question in order to hold open rather than assimilate.

**Keywords:** *existential phenomenology, psychoanalysis, post modernism, the relational, play, the unknown, experience, post-existentialism.*

**Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Non-Intentionality in Post-Existential Practice**  
*A Case of Counselling with a Person Diagnosed with Dementia*

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**Abstract**

This paper examines a clinical case study of psychotherapy with a person diagnosed with dementia, which lasted for over three years and formed part of a research project exploring the possibility of psychotherapy with this client group. The practice example described here provided the opportunity to explore possible implications for both research and theory in relation to what is being described as the post-existential (Loewenthal, 2007). A phenomenological hermeneutic approach to case study is outlined, which allows the researcher the freedom to explore the theoretical implications for practice without being overwhelmed by the dogma of scientific method and notions of truth or certainty. This paper explores the 'subjective' limits of phenomenology and existentialism by looking at the work of Buber and the 'I-Thou' relationship and considering the challenge made by the continental philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, to the whole concept of 'intentionality'.

**Keywords:** *dementia, non-intentional, research, practice*

**Therapy's Modernist 'Regime of Truth'**

*From Scientific 'Theory-Mindedness' towards the Subtle and the Mysterious*

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'Look within yourselves and you will find everything ... [W]e must investigate experience as it is concretely lived on all levels, including the dark, hidden recesses of the mind.'

Goëthe (quoted in Askay and Farquar, 2006: 72)

**Abstract**

A ubiquitous assumption of the psychotherapy landscape is the axiom that *theory* is an indispensable accompaniment of psychotherapy praxis. Yet a range of leading philosophers and spiritual masters tell a very different story, which can give us incisive and productive purchase on some of the central lacunae of modern(ist) psychotherapy practice. At least some existentialist and kindred philosophers maintain that the embrace of theory and scientism necessarily constrains, and at worst determines, what we can perceive and experience of the world (which includes knowledge about ourselves). This paper offers an account as to why a 'modernist' view of the role of theory is not only unsustainable, but also fundamentally antithetical to psychotherapy practice at its best. On this view, what is termed a 'post-existential' therapy praxis is the very antithesis of the kind of scientism that still dominates much psychotherapeutic thinking. The paper concludes with some speculatively sketchy comments about the place of what is (riskily) labelled 'the subtle' and 'the mysterious' in therapy work and in human experience more generally—comments which are couched within what is here termed a 'trans-modern', New Paradigm cosmology. As we pass through what are arguably the death throes of Late Modernity, such a 'post-theoretical' approach to therapy practice is tentatively labelled as 'post-existential', as while it shares many features in common with what is termed 'existential-phenomenological psychotherapy', at the same time it also moves crucially beyond the latter both in its due recognition of the importance of psychoanalytic and post-modern thinking in challenging a naïve existential conception of human agency, and in its explicit openness to the trans-modern, the spiritual and the ineffable.

**Keywords:** *theory; scientism; post-existentialism; psychotherapy; phenomenology; modernity; postmodernism; the subtle; the mysterious*

**Language, Experience and Representation**  
*A Re-Examination of the Case of Lola Voss*

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**Abstract**

The intention of this paper is to consider the possibility of a post-existential position on the representation of experience in language by first, within this context, contrasting existentialism with structural linguistics. Binswanger's 'Case of Lola Voss' is re-examined and an outline of existential and linguistic positions are given on the subjects of 'reality' and 'experience' and their relation to language. The question arises as to whether experience is to be found in what is said, or in the saying? A further question is then examined regarding whether it is perhaps self deception which causes us to reach for pre-existing linguistic constructs to represent that which existed originally outside of linguistic categorisation?

**Keywords:** *Binswanger, existentialism, structural linguistics, post-existentialism*